

New cases, hospitalizations, and deaths have been declining. The CDC reports that one in five adult Americans has already received at least one vaccine dose. That is 50-plus million people. One in 10 has gotten both shots. And the supply of vaccines is continuing to ramp up with yet another authorized just last weekend.

Meanwhile, science keeps confirming it is quite safe to get kids and teachers back in the classroom with simple precautions that we can accomplish right now. All indications suggest our economy is poised for a roaring comeback for workers and for families.

This crossroads should give Washington a golden opportunity. We could get together on a bipartisan basis like we did five times last year—five times—and pass more targeted policies to help finish the fight and get the American people their jobs, their schools, their lives, and their country back.

A number of Senate Republicans went to the White House just days after President Biden was sworn in, proposing we continue the streak of overwhelming bipartisanship that has designed the COVID-19 response all this time. Our Democratic colleagues said no; they wanted to go it alone. And when you look at their partisan bill, you can certainly see why.

Less than 9 percent of their massive proposal would go to the core healthcare fight against COVID-19. Listen to this: Less than 1 percent goes to vaccinations.

You see, they had to leave room for all the completely unrelated, leftwing pet priorities, like sending \$350 billion to bail out long-mismanaged State and local governments, multiple times the expert estimate of COVID needs; things like massive expansion and ObamaCare subsidies that would disproportionately benefit wealthier people; things like handcrafted tweaks to Medicare so it pays more money to just three States: Rhode Island, New Jersey, and the President's home State of Delaware. You might call it a special kick-back for the Acela Corridor.

They had to make room to bankroll things like underground rail in Silicon Valley, upgrading a bridge from New York to Canada, and giving Planned Parenthood access to taxpayer money meant to rescue mom-and-pop Main Street businesses.

Sadly, the parts that actually do relate to the pandemic aren't much better. At the same time that Democrats refuse to follow the science on in-person schooling, they want to pass a massive new set of deluxe benefits for Federal Government employees, including 15 weeks of paid vacation for folks whose children have the option—just the option—of virtual or even hybrid learning.

They want to keep schools closed and then pay a special bonus only to parents who are Federal employees because—because their schools are closed.

Now, this isn't a recipe to safely reopen America. To the degree that it even addresses the pandemic, it is more like a plan to keep it shut down.

Mostly, it is just what Democrats promised almost a year ago: taking advantage of the crisis to check off unrelated liberal policies.

IRAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on another matter, we recently learned that Iran has balked at the prospect of direct nuclear negotiations with the United States and Europe. This sort of resistance and gamesmanship is nothing new. We have seen this before.

Iran has long flouted international restrictions on its nuclear program, played hide-and-seek with U.N. inspectors, and failed to disclose the full scope of its nuclear research. This happened before, during, and after the Obama administration's Iran deal.

Now, thanks to the firm approach taken by the Republican administration which restored much of the leverage President Obama had thrown away, President Biden inherited a much, much stronger negotiating position.

Let me make it clear. Republicans do not oppose nuclear diplomacy. We hope the administration will secure a better, stronger, and more lasting deal than President Obama's, but to do so, President Biden's team must avoid the mistakes of the JCPOA.

Here is how you do that: coordinate closely with the partners and allies who are most immediately threatened by Tehran; treat Congress as a partner to be consulted, not a problem to be managed; and, most importantly, don't give up any leverage for free.

Of course the mullahs are playing coy. They want concessions before they even come to the table. In December, after President Biden was elected, Iran's Parliament reaffirmed their intent to continue acting out if sanctions were not eased.

Well, I hope it is only the Iranians and not the administration's negotiators who need this reminder: Look, the United States holds all the cards. President Biden is the Commander in Chief of a superpower. There are no circumstances—none—in which Iran should get money for nothing. And there is no need to rush into the talks.

The administration should take care not to squander our upper hand just to spite the last administration, nor should President Biden's team discount the value of the growing regional unity against Iran that is embodied in the new Abraham Accords.

Every day, headlines remind the world of the threat Iran and its proxies pose to peace and security. For example, the Iranian journalist, Ruhollah Zam, was lured back to the region from Europe, kidnapped, and hanged after a sham trial just in December.

The Lebanese activist, Lokman Slim, was an outspoken critic of Hezbollah until he was shot dead in his car.

The regime has kept escalating its support of the Houthis rebels in Yemen, sending in deadlier, longer range weapons, and inciting terrorist threats.

The Houthis have escalated attacks on Yemen's neighbors, including in civilian areas, and launched a military offensive that jeopardizes the peace negotiations being undertaken by U.N. Special Envoy Martin Griffiths.

Just last week, an Israeli civilian shipping vessel pulled into port with gaping damage from a missile attack, and Tehran's pet militias in Iraq have fired rocket barrages against our own American diplomatic and military facilities. They are communicating to the Biden administration in the mullahs' preferred language: violence.

Like I said over the weekend, President Biden is right to respond to this threat by authorizing strikes against targets belonging to Iranian proxy groups—the right decision—and he is right to recognize the need for new binding and enforceable constraints on Iran's nuclear capabilities, but, ultimately, we need a comprehensive approach to confronting Iran. It must be built on bipartisan foundations to endure for administrations and Congresses yet to come.

To get there—to get there, the administration must continue to meet Iranian aggression from a position of strength and consult closely with Congress for the sake of our own security and that of our friends and partners in the Ayatollah's backyard.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Gina Marie Raimondo, of Rhode Island, to be Secretary of Commerce.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I have come to the floor, on several occasions now, to talk about this \$1.9 trillion spending bill that will be soon before this body.

I have talked about different parts of the bill on different occasions. I have talked about the mandates, the bailouts, and the billions and billions of dollars of spending completely unrelated to coronavirus. Now, these are all reasons enough to oppose this piece of legislation.

Today, I would like to talk about another problem that I see with the bill,